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## HEALTH OFFICIALS ENCOURAGE INFLUENZA VACCINE

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**Sanford, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Seminole County (DOH-Seminole) reminds residents to protect themselves and their families from influenza (flu). Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness and can sometimes lead to death. The flu season usually begins in early October and lasts until May.

Pregnant women are especially encouraged to get vaccinated. Pregnancy's effect on the immune system can cause a more severe infection leading to poor outcomes for both mother and baby. Others who should get vaccinated include caregivers of infants younger than six months, infants and children older than six months, and adults sixty-five and older. It is also important for those with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, and heart or lung disease to get vaccinated.

Flu vaccine may be given as a shot or a nasal spray. The flu shot is approved for use in people six months of age and older, including people with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women. The nasal spray is approved for use in people two through forty-nine years of age who do not have underlying medical conditions and are not pregnant. The vaccine takes approximately two weeks to become fully effective.

DOH-Seminole's Immunization Clinic is open Monday through Friday at 400 West Airport Boulevard in Sanford. Individuals wishing to have a flu shot at DOH-Seminole need to schedule an appointment. To schedule an appointment, call the Immunization Clinic appointment line at 407-665-3700.

"Influenza is in the top ten reasons why people die in the country," said Dr. Swannie Jett, Health Officer for DOH-Seminole. "Individuals with chronic diseases should get vaccinated to avoid illness."

Symptoms of the flu may include cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue, and fever. Some people may also experience diarrhea and vomiting. Health officials advise individuals who are at risk of complications from influenza to contact their physician immediately if flu symptoms appear. Individuals should see a physician early, as antiviral medications may be effective in reducing the severity of symptoms or the length of the illness. Individuals can protect themselves and their families from the flu by practicing preventive behaviors. While the best way to prevent the flu is by getting vaccinated every year, frequent hand washing is another important key to prevention.

For more information about the flu, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/). Additional information can also be found at DOH-Seminole's website, [www.seminolecohealth.com](http://www.seminolecohealth.com).

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